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First Intifada

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The **First Intifada** (1987–1993) (also "intifada" and "war of the stones") was a mass Palestinian uprising against Israeli rule^[3] that began in the Jabalia refugee camp and quickly spread throughout Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.^[4]

Palestinian actions ranged from civil disobedience to violence. In addition to general strikes, boycotts on Israeli products, graffiti, and barricades, Palestinian demonstrations that included stone-throwing by youths against the heavily-armed Israeli Defense Forces brought the intifada international attention.^[5] Intra-Palestinian violence was also a prominent feature of the Intifada, with widespread executions of alleged Israeli collaborators contributing almost half of the death toll among Palestinians.

Over the course of the first intifada, an estimated 1,100 Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces and 160 Israelis were killed by Palestinians. In addition, an estimated 1,000 Palestinians were killed by Palestinians as alleged collaborators, although fewer than half had any proven contact with the Israeli authorities.^{[6][7]}

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General causes

After Israel's capture of the West Bank and Gaza Strip from Egypt and Jordan in the wake of the Six-Day War in 1967, a growing sense of frustration among Palestinians living in the Israeli-occupied territories had developed. The "Iron Fist" policy launched by Israel in 1985 along with economic integration and an increase in settler activity was in what the then Israeli minister of Economics and Finance, Gad Ya'acobi, noted "a creeping process of *de facto* annexation" contributed to a growing militancy of Palestinian society.^[8] According to Donald Neff, "The immediate cause" of the First Intifada came on 8 December 1987, when an Israeli army tank transporter ran into a group of Palestinians from Jabalya refugee camp in Gaza Strip, killing four and injuring seven."^[9]

First Intifada

Part of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Israeli-Palestinian conflict



Media coverage of the first Intifada (1987-1992) often focused on young Palestinians throwing stones at tanks and Israeli soldiers.

Date 1987-1993

Location West Bank, Gaza Strip, Israel

Result Oslo Accords


Belligerents

 Israel

 Palestinian dissidents

Commanders

 Yitzhak Shamir

 Unified National Leadership of the Uprising^[1]

Casualties and losses

160^[2]

1,162 by Israelis^[2]
1,000 by Palestinians

Background

The First Intifada came at a time when Palestinians were protesting acts taken by Israel that they perceived as brutal and of political stalemate with parties involved in the Arab–Israeli conflict. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) had not brought about any solutions to alleviate Palestinian suffering and in 1982, during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the organization had been forced to relocate their offices to Tunis.^[10] The Arab summit in Amman in November 1987 focused on the Iran–Iraq War, and the Palestinian issue was shunted to the sidelines for the first time in years.^{[11][12]} Israeli military occupation of Southern Lebanon and the continued Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip contributed to growing discontent with the status quo.

Catalysts

Palestinians and their supporters assert that the Intifada was a protest against Israeli repression which included extra-judicial killings, mass detentions, house demolitions, deportations, and so on.^[13] While relatively few houses were demolished in the years before the Intifada, house demolitions "appeared to have deterrent value" to Israel. After the start of the Intifada, and after the PLO began compensating affected families, demolitions "were transformed into a stimulus to further escalation of resistance."^[14] In addition to the political and national sentiment, further causes to the Intifada can be seen in the Egyptian withdrawal from their claims to the Gaza Strip as well as the Jordanian monarchy growing weary of supporting its claims to the West Bank.

High birth rates and the limited allocation of land for new building and agriculture contributed to the increasing density of population in the Palestinian territories and a rise in unemployment. While income from manual labor in Israel was beneficial to the Palestinian economy, jobs were growing scarcer, even for those with university degrees. At the time of the Intifada, only one in eight college-educated Palestinians could find degree-related work.^[15]

One incident that was often mentioned as a motivation is the perceived IDF failure in the "Night of the Gliders", or the "Kibia action", in which a Palestinian guerrilla infiltrated an IDF army camp from Lebanon and managed to kill six soldiers.^{[16][17][18]}

Leadership

The Palestinians felt abandoned by their Arab allies and the PLO had failed to successfully challenge Israel and establish a Palestinian state in its stead, as promised, despite thwarting Israeli attempts to organize puppet elections in the territories. The first Intifada (1987 - 1993), was a spontaneous explosion of popular resistance to the Israeli occupation, a resistance which had begun some fifty years before.

The Intifada was not initiated by any single individual or organization, but the PLO soon established itself at the forefront enhancing their presence in the territories. Local leadership came from groups and organizations loyal to the PLO that operated within the Occupied Territories; Fatah, the Popular Front, the Democratic Front and the Palestine Communist Party.^[19] The PLO's rivals in this activity were the Islamic organizations, Hamas and Islamic Jihad as well as local leadership in cities such as Beit Sahour and Bethlehem. However, the uprising was predominantly led by community councils led by Hanan Ashrawi, Faisal Husseini and Haidar Abdel-Shafi, that promoted independent networks for education (underground schools as the regular schools were closed by the military as reprisals for the uprising), medical care, and food aid.^[20] The Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU) gained credibility where the Palestinian society complied with the issued communiques.^[19]

The uprising

After the traffic incident at the Erez Crossing that killed four Palestinian refugees, rumor quickly spread that the wreck was deliberate and an act of vengeance in response to the Israeli stabbed to death several days earlier in the Gaza market. That evening, an uprising began in Jabalia where hundreds of Palestinians burned tires and attacked the IDF troops stationed there. The uprising spread to other Palestinian refugee camps and eventually to several major cities. On December 22, the United Nations Security Council condemned Israel in Resolution 605 for violating the Geneva Conventions due to the number of Palestinian deaths in these first few weeks of the Intifada.^[21]

The IDF was given truncheons and encouraged to break the bones of Palestinian protesters.^[22] This aggressive stance was expressed by Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin during his tour of the Jalazon Refugee Camp in January 1988, when he stated "The first priority of the security forces is to prevent violent demonstrations with force, power and blows ... We will make it clear who is running the territories".^[4] The Swedish branch of Save the Children estimated that, "23,600 to 29,900 children required medical treatment for their beating injuries in the first two years of the intifada", one third of whom were children under the age of ten years old.^[22]

On April 19, 1988, a leader of the PLO, Abu Jihad, was assassinated in Tunis. During the resurgence of rioting that followed, about 16 Palestinians were killed. In November of the same year and October of the next, the United Nations General Assembly passed resolutions condemning Israel^[23]

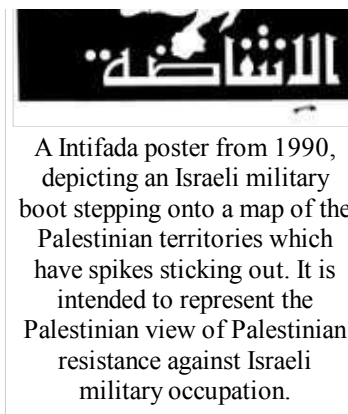
The Israeli state apparatus carried out contradictory and conflicting policies that injured Israel's own interests such as the closing of education establishments (putting more youths onto the streets) and issuing the Shin Bet list of collaborators.^[24]

In 1989, local committees in Beit Sahour initiated a nonviolence movement to withhold taxes,^[25] taking up the slogan "No Taxation Without Representation,"^[26] the legality of which under international law is disputed. The Israeli defense minister Yitzhak Rabin response was: "We will teach them there is a price for refusing the laws of Israel."^[27] When time in prison did not stop the activists, Israel crushed the boycott by imposing heavy fines while seizing and disposing the equipment, furnishings, and goods from local stores, factories, and homes.^[23]

As the Intifada progressed, Israel introduced various riot control methods that had the effect of reducing the number of Palestinian fatalities. Moshe Arens subsequently proved to have a better understanding of pacification, which perhaps reflects in the lower casualty rates for the following years. In July 1989, the first suicide attack occurred inside Israel's borders: the Tel Aviv Jerusalem bus 405 massacre. Suicide bombings by Palestinian militants started in April 16, 1993 with the Mehola Junction bombing, carried out towards the end of the Intifada.^[28]

In 1990, 21 Israeli soldiers confessed to frequent repeated brutal assaults against Palestinians. Yishai-Karin reported that Israeli soldiers were exposed to violence against Palestinians during the first weeks of training. The soldiers also expressed feelings of joy when they were given power to instill fear and use physical violence on the Palestinians. One soldier recalls shooting an unarmed Palestinian for no reason, "We were in a weapons carrier when this guy, around 25, passed by in the street and, just like that, for no reason - he didn't throw a stone did nothing - bang, a bullet in the stomach, he shot him in the stomach and the guy is dying on the pavement and we keep going, apathetic. No one gave him a second look," he said.^[29]

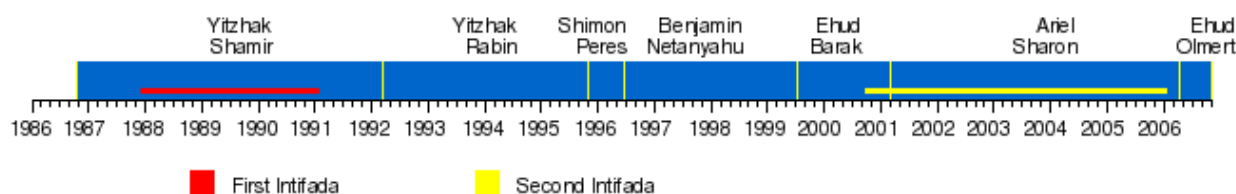
By June 1990, according to Benny Morris, "[T]he Intifada seemed to have lost direction. A symptom of the PLO's frustration was the great increase in the killing of suspected collaborators; in 1991 the Israelis killed more Palestinians - about 100 - about 150."^{[30][6]} Attempts at the peace process in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were made at the Madrid Conference of 1991.



Outcome

The intifada was not a military endeavor in either a conventional or guerrilla sense. The PLO - which had limited control of the situation - never expected the uprising to make any direct gains against the Israeli state, as it was a grassroots, mass movement and not their venture. However, the Intifada did produce a number of results the Palestinians considered positive:

- By engaging the Israelis directly, rather than relying on the authority or the assistance of neighboring Arab states, the Palestinians were able to globally cement their identity as a separate nation worthy of self-determination.^[31] The era marked the end of the Israeli discussion of a "Jordanian solution" to merge the Palestinian territories with Jordan. The combination of the failure of the "Iron Fist" policy, Israel's deteriorating international image and Jordan cutting legal and administrative ties to the West Bank with the U.S.'s recognition of the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people forced Rabin to seek an end the violence though negotiation and dialogue with the PLO.^{[32][33]}
- The Israeli countermeasures (particularly during the earlier years of the Intifada) resulted in international attention to the Palestinians' cause. The fact that 159 Palestinian children below the age of 16 were killed (many of them shot while throwing stones at IDF soldiers) was especially alarming for international observers. Significantly, numerous American media outlets openly criticized Israel in a way that they had not previously.^[34] The conflict succeeded in putting the Palestinian question back on the international agenda, particularly in the United Nations, but also for the European Community and the United States as well as the Arab states - which during the 1980s were concentrated on the Iran–Iraq War. The European Community (later European Union) became an important economic contributor towards the nascent Palestinian Authority, and American aid and support of Israel became more conditional than it was previously at least in appearance.
- The Intifada also dealt a heavy economic blow to Israel. The Bank of Israel estimated it cost the country \$650 million in lost exports, largely through successful Palestinian boycotts and the creation of local micro industries. The impact on the services sector, including the important Israeli tourist industry, was notably negative.^[35]
- The uprising can be linked to the Madrid Conference of 1991, and thereby to the return of the Palestinian Liberation Organization from their Tunisian exile. Prior to the first Intifada, it was doubtful whether there would ever be a Palestinian state. After the Oslo accords, an independent Palestinian entity at sometime in the future seemed relatively certain.
- The Intifada pinpointed numerous problems with the IDF's conduct in the operative and tactical fields, as well as the general problem of Israel's prolonged control of the West Bank and Gaza strip. These problems were noticed and widely criticized, both in international forums (in particular, when humanitarian questions were at stake), but also in Israeli public opinion, in which the Intifada had caused a split.
- It was expected that the approximate 120,000 detainees would form a cadre for a continuation of the Intifada if the two sides could not find a mutually acceptable solution.^[36]



See also

- Second Intifada
- Sumud